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SUBJECT: DPP WEEKEND CAMPAIGN EFFORT FOCUSES ON LOVE RIVER'S
EMOTIONAL APPEAL

REF: 2006 Taipei 3960

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1. (SBU) Summary: The ruling DPP is holding a mass rally in Kaohsiung on Sunday December 3 aimed at energizing supporters to boost the prospects of mayoral candidate Chen Chu winning election on December 9. Ostensibly organized by the Southern Taiwan Association, the "Love Kaohsiung, Cherish Taiwan" event will be held at Kaohsiung's Love River to underscore the accomplishments of the DPP city government. The KMT is planning a march on the same day to rally support for its candidate Huang Chun-ying. Both sides are concerned that the "cold" election climate this year could depress voter turnout, affecting the outcome of this very close race. Although KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou and President Chen Shui-bian are likely to attend this weekend's activities, most AIT/K contacts believe the two leaders will have only a marginal effect on the race. End Summary.

Love River: Boost for Chen Chu?

2. (SBU) The DPP is hoping that this weekend's December 3 rally at the Love River will energize its voter base and give a boost to DPP candidate Chen Chu ahead of the December 9 election. The DPP regards former Mayor Frank Hsieh's cleanup and beautification of the Love River as one of its major accomplishments in Kaohsiung. Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) Deputy Secretary-General Huang Chao-chang told AIT/K that the rally, ostensibly organized by the non-party affiliated Southern Taiwan Association (STA), is an obvious election ploy to help Chen Chu. Furious with the STA, Huang complained that the association has refused to invite TSU candidate Lo Chih-ming to participate. To add insult to injury, the STA has also been calling for TSU supporters to dump Lo and vote for Chen as the only pan-Green candidate with a chance of winning. Despite STA and DPP efforts to lure Lo's supporters, Huang believes the corruption investigations against President Chen and his family and close staff are having a significant dampening impact on Chen Chu's campaign and will make it difficult to draw votes away from Lo. Huang argued that the low participation at recent DPP rallies indicates the party is having difficulty mobilizing supporters. As a result, he predicted, voter turnout will be lower than in previous elections.

3. (SBU) A DPP official from Tainan told AIT/K that party branches from the surrounding counties have been asked to mobilize supporters for the "Love Kaohsiung, Cherish Taiwan" rally in Kaohsiung. He added, however, that most attendees will hail from the Kaohsiung area. A Chen Chu campaign assistant acknowledged that the DPP is

under "enormous pressure" to win the Kaohsiung election. The rally presents an opportunity to make an emotional appeal that aims to inspire voters by recalling the past achievements of the DPP administration in Kaohsiung and stressing the importance of continued DPP leadership to the future development of the city. One KMT official acknowledged that the rally is a smart move by the DPP to stir up supporters who have been depressed about the ongoing corruption investigations plaguing President Chen, his family, and top aides.

The Chen and Ma Factors

¶4. (SBU) So far President Chen has not participated in any campaign events on behalf of Chen Chu and it remains unclear whether his expected appearance at the December 3 rally would significantly boost her campaign. Local party contacts say that an appearance by President Chen would only help energize deep-Green supporters, but would have little sway in attracting swing voters who have lost faith in the President. As a result, some believe President Chen should not participate in the rally. The TSU's Huang told AIT/K that Chen Chu fears an appearance by Chen Shui-bian could actually hurt her support among swing voters, but she is unwilling to publicly distance herself from the President. Local KMT officials hope that continuing negative press coverage of the Presidential family will boost their mayoral candidate's chances on December 9.

¶5. (SBU) In contrast to President Chen, KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou has campaigned vigorously for Huang Chun-ying and plans to attend campaign rallies over the weekend. A KMT legislative contact suggested to AIT/K that Ma's mayoral special budget accounting problems have had only minimal effect on Huang's prospects. Ma's

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appeal with young and female voters, moreover, could help compensate for Huang's stodgy, less charismatic image. The campaign, according to this contact, is in effect a proxy contest between President Chen and Chairman Ma. Chen hopes to lead Kaohsiung to victory in order to stem his and the DPP's downward slide since last year, while Ma hopes a victory will reinvigorate his recently tarnished 2008 presidential prospects.

Not Playing the "Taiwan Identity" Card?

¶6. (SBU) Chen Chu recently told the DDIR she would not play the polarizing Taiwan identity card (reftel). DPP contacts tell AIT/K the party will not hold campaign-related activities to commemorate the anniversary of the Kaohsiung incident on December 10. A KMT contact suggested that DPP efforts in the 2005 3-in-1 elections to exploit "Taiwan identity" issues failed to have much resonance with voters, especially those under the age of 40, who had no significant recollection of the Kaohsiung incident, which occurred 27 years ago.

Comment

¶7. (SBU) The Kaohsiung mayoral election remains too close to call. While the corruption scandals surrounding President Chen have damaged the DPP by depressing Deep Green enthusiasm and alienating swing voters, Chen Chu is a stronger campaigner than her KMT rival Huang Chun-ying. A saying popular in Kaohsiung these days holds that victory or defeat both come from Chen Shui-bian. In other words, if Chen Chu loses, blame for the defeat will be placed squarely on the beleaguered President, as he struggles to retain core DPP support in the face of on-going pan-Blue efforts to force him from office. Thus the stakes in this southern Taiwan contest have major national implications.

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